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AUTHOR Andersen, Peter A.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

To test several hypotheses related to source credibility, comprehension, and homophily of the source, a study was designed. The 124 college students from a basic communication course who served as subjects were presented a message on the effects of slavery in America by either a homophilous source, who wore his hair standing out from his head or who wore very casual clothes, and a heterophilous source, who wore his hair flattened down or who wore formal clothes. After the message, subjects were given a questionnaire containing 12 semantic differential scales measuring source credibility and a 10-question multiple choice test. Results of a 2-by-2 (hair style by dress style) analysis of variance showed that the audience did not perceive the long-haired homophilous speaker as more credible, although they did perceive the casually-dressed homophilous speaker as significantly more credible. No significant effect on comprehension was produced by the independent variables. (SH)

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THE EFFECTS OF HOMOPHILOUS HAIR AND DRESS STYLES ON CREDIBILITY AND COMPREHENSION

by

Peter A. Andersen, Thomas A. Jensen & Lyle B. King

Department of Speech Communication

Illinois State University

Normal, Illinois 61761

Atlanta, Georgia

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A question of much contemporary significance is the effect of appearance on one's ability to communicate successfully. The relevance of this question is manifested by numerous situations in which varying dress and hair styles inhibit communication. Results of experimentation would be useful to parents, educators, job-seekers, politicians, and to anyone who is faced with an intergenerational or intercultural communication experience.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research in the field of irrelevant factors determining credibility has dealt mainly with dress. Authors have found that status is indeed ascribed on the basis of a person's dress style. Hoult (1954) conducted extensive research on the correlation between clothing and the status of men. In his first experiment judges of status were familiar with subjects they evaluated. Not surprisingly their familiarity overcame the clothing variable and no effects due to clothing were observed. In his second experiment the subjects were unfamiliar to the judges. A significant relationship was discovered between clothing style and a man's perceived status.

Rosencranz (1962) was interested in the effect clothing had on how people perceived another person. She administed a test consisting of seven pictures and respondents offered feedback as to what economic status or social role the subject

appeared to carrying out. The respondents themselves represented varying social and economic backgrounds. While all respondents perceived some difference in status and background respondents with higher occupational status, income, education organizational membership, magazine readership and verbal intelligence had greater awareness of clothing style and its role in determining one's status.

Another study examining the relationship between dress and perceived status was performed by Douty (1963). Like Rosencrantz (1962), she hypothesized that dress does help determine socio-economic status. She concluded that impressions of people were greatly influenced by clothing. Further, she stated "knowledge derived from such studies could lead to a greater ability to predict the effect that clothing will have on perception of persons."

Hamid (1968) replicated the studies of Rosencrantz and Douty and concluded that dress causes people to be catagorized. The importance of the experiment was that Rosencrantz's (1962) and Douty's (1963) experiments were verified for more contemporary style of clothing. Kelly (1969) was able to establish that dress style determined political stereotypes. Less conventional clothing was rated as being worn by people with leftest political views and were regarded as pro-negro, against the Vietnam war and as marijuana users. The more conventional dress styles were associated with football and Fraternities. Kelly thus established that non-verbal cues as simple as clothing styles significantly influenced perceptions. The role of

dress in determining status and prestige has clearly been established. We can infer, as do Andersen and Clevenger (1963), that status and prestige are closely related to credibility and thus predict that clothing will have a significant effect on credibility.

A study which further establishes the significance of irrele vant factors on credibility is Aronson and Golden's (1962) experiment They measured the effects of race on credibility when the initial credibility of a speaker was high and when it was low They presented the same message to an audience using two independent variables, status and race. First a message was presented by two men one black and one white. Both were identified as nuclear physicists working for the government. The strength of their initial credibility based on occupation negated any effects of race on credibility. When low status, that of a dishwasher, was ascribed to the same two sources, the white source was perceived as more credible than the black source at a level just short of 05 significance The effect of race as a factor in inducing credibility was thus indicated An interesting aspect of the experiment was the use of clothing as well as occupational titles as means of establishing credibility. The nuclear physicists wore conservative grey suits and the dishwashers wore kaki pants perhaps further establishing the importance of clothing in determining credibility.

No recent studys are available on the importance of hair style in establishing credibility. The easily observable reactions of persons of differeing hair lengths to each other alludes to a relationship between hair lengths and such factors as status and

credibility A second reason for the assumption that hair style is related to credibility is the importance of other similar factors. Andersen and Clevenger (1963) conclude, "Such non-content stimuli as dress, voice and manner affect the attitude of the audience toward the speaker." Since, researchers established a link between other irrelevant factors and credibility it is logical to assume that hair style would also influence credibility.

A link between high credibility and comprehension has never been clearly established. Several authors (Haiman, 1948; Nichols, 1948; Gilkison Paulson, & Sikkink, 1953), have found some relationship between high credibility levels and comprehension. Haiman (1948) was able to establish such a relationship at the .06 level of significance.

Several studies have found a relationship between nuetral or low credibility levels and increased comprehension (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Kelman and Hovland, 1953; Petrie, 1963). It seems obvious that other variables have intervened to alter comprehension. An alternative explaination is that credibility has different effects on comprehension in various situations.

The largest body of studies have found no significant effect of credibility on comprehension (Petrie, 1963; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Hovland Janis, and Kelly, 1953; Thompkins and Samovar, 1963 and King, 1964). Andersen and Clevenger (1963) state, " . . . there is not enough evidence to suggest that the ammount of information gained from exposure to a message is related to the ethos of the source . . . " The results of such studies may

have been obscured by heightening of attention levels during presentations and thereby causing significant increases in comprehension regardless of credibility levels. The use of tape recorders, pretests, guest speakers, speakers without sufficient cover story, presentations by teachers, introductions by teachers, compulsory attendance and testing during or immediately after the presentation all have acted to heighten attention level and cause greater comprehension to occur at all levels of credibility. Thus, even in light of many studies which found no relationship between credibility and comprehension, such a relationship may exist.

Studies in selective attention (Key, 1968) have concluded that attention and perhaps comprehension is increased when people agree with a concept. Studies in selective exposure (Postman, Brunor and McGinnes, 1948) have indicated that barriers are erected which block value-descrepant messages. Selective recall can also decrease recall of a message. Thus the principles of selectivity indicate that credibility may effect comprehension.

If hair and dress styles affect credibility and if credibility affects comprehension then it is likely that hair and dress styles indirectly affect comprehension. Re-inforcing this notion is the principle of homophily--homophilous, or like individuals, communicate better than heterophilous, or unlike individuals (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971; Barnlund and Harland, 1963). The principle of homophily would seem to indicate that such factors as similarity of hair and dress style could make communication

more affective thus increasing comprehension.

HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1. An audience's perception of a source's credibility will be significantly increased if the source has an homophilous hair style

Hypothesis 2. An audiences perception of a source's credibility will be increased if the source has an homophilous style of clothing

Hypothesis 3 Increased perceived credibility will increase an audience's comprehension of a message.

Hypothesis 4 Homophilous hair styles will increase an audience's comprehension of a message.

Hypothesis 5. Homophilous styles of clothing will increase an audience's comprehension of a message.

LOGISTICS OF THE STUDY

Procedures

Subjects were presented a message on the effects of slavery in America. The message was presented first or second in a series of six speeches given in a basic communication class at Illinois State University. At the conclusion of the entire two hour period subjects were given a questionaire containing 12 semantic differential scales and a 10 question multiple choice test.

A cover story was used for the speaker and the questionaire. The speaker was said to be a student from another class who was making up a speech due to absence. The questionaire was said to be the means of evaluation used by the teacher in the other class.

Selection of Subjects

One-hundred and twenty-four subjects were randomly selected from a basic communication class at Illinois State University.

Selection of Measurement

The first dependent variable, credibility, was measured by semantic differential scales (McCroskey, Scott and Young, 1971). The authors used peer group scales which measured credibility in four dimensions; dynamism, competance, composure, and sociability.

The comprehension test was constructed by the authors. A multiple-choice test of 31 questions was constructed, this was based on the message. It was pre-tested using forty subjects. Based on an item analysis 10 questions were selected, 7 intact and 3 were modified to establish better foils. A 2 x 2 (hair style by dress style) analysis of variance, equal n, and subsequent t-tests were used to examine the data gathered.

Operational Definitions

The homophilous hair style was produced by combing the speaker's hair so it stood out from his head 1½ inches and appeared to be quite long.

The heterophilous hair style was produced by combing the speaker's hair flat on his head

The homophilous clothing style was the casual style. The speaker wore faded blue jeans and a blue plaid work shirt.

The heterophilous clothing style was the formal style. The speaker wore dress pants, a tie and a suitcoat.

RESULTS

The data generated by the experimental treatments only confirmed hypothesis two. The homophilous style of clothing was perceived to be significantly higher on the credibility dimensions of sociability, competence, composure, and dynamism, than the heterophilous style. The first hypothesis was not confirmed as the heterophilous hair style was rated significantly higher on the credibility dimensions of competence and dynamism, than the homophilous hair style. Hypotheses three, four and five were not confirmed as the analysis of the comprehension dependent variable did not achieve a significant (p .05) F-ratio

TABLE RESULTS*

CLOTHING

Cred Dimension	Homophily	Heterophily
Composure	11.35a	10.42a
Competence	11.68b	10.45b
Dynamism	12.50c	11.00c
Sociability	5.92d	5.00d

HAIR

Cred Dimension	Homophily	Heterophily
Competence	10.44e	11.69e
Dynamism	11.31f	12.19f
Composure	10.65g	11.13h
Sociability	5.26i	5.66j

COMPREHENSION

	F Ratio	Significant F Ratio
Row	0.3801	3.92
Column	0.1939	3.92
Row x Column	0.3800	3.92

*means with the same subscript are significantly different ($p < .05$)

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1 was not confirmed. The audience did not perceive the speaker in his long-haired condition as more credible. Indeed, the short-haired condition was found to be more credible on the competence and dynamism conditions. The fact that the speaker was an intercollegiate debater and a skillful speaker may have caused this result. The speaker has no discernable accent, used no jargon, and is of a rural middle class. This may have caused the audience to perceive him as more consistant in the short-haired condition. Therefore the results were possibly an artifact of the speaker's personality.

Hypothesis 2 was confirmed. On all four dimensions of credibility (competence, dynamism, sociability, and composure), the homophilous speaker was found to be more credible. The results conflict with a study by Jensen and Hunter (1972) conducted at the same time. Jensen and Hunter used photographs and found that the heterophilous condition (a suit) was perceived as more competant. The fact that one experiment was conducted

with a live source and the other with a printed message and photographs may explain the conflict. However, further study is recommended

Hypothesis 3, 4, and 5 were not confirmed. No significant effect on comprehension was produced by any of the independent variables, hair style, clothing style, or credibility. This result is consistant with several previous experiments which have found little or no relationship between credibility and comprehension.

The authors believe they were able to reduce the high attention level created in previous experiments. In previous experiments mean scores were quite high indicating a significant amount of recall and perhaps obscuring credibility levels. The average score on our comprehension test was 4.5 of 10 correct answers. This indicates that high attention or retention levels present in previous experiments, was not present here Nonetheless the mean scores for each condition were extremely close, iidicating no link between credibility and comprehension. Since attention was carefully controlled this result may have added significance. This study provides an alternative explanation for the results of previous experiments. Experiments using other messages may be used in future studies to determine is this was an artifact of the message presented.

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